

interruptions we observed, and interrupted more in every exchange in our collection. In a subsequent study (West & Zimmerman, 1977) we compared these eleven cross-sex exchanges with five parent-child interactions recorded in a physician's office. Finding that parents interrupted children on twelve of the initial fourteen occasions, we noted that females and young children apparently receive similar treatment in conversations with males and with adults (see also Greif, 1980). We suggested that repeated interruption by one's conversational partner might be not only a consequence of one's lesser status but also a way of establishing and maintaining that status differential (West & Zimmerman, 1977).

Since our original sampling procedure was non-random, we are concerned with whether the generality of our findings extends beyond the particular conversations we happened to record. Many of the conversations between adults, for example, were conducted among friends relaxing in a variety of locations (such as drugstores, coffee shops, and other public places in a university community);¹ both the casual settings and degree of familiarity between speakers may have contributed to our findings. As Goffman observes:

When a set of persons are on familiar terms and feel that they need not stand on ceremony with one another, then inattentiveness and interruptions are likely to become rife, and talk may degenerate into a happy babble of disorganized sound. (Goffman, 1967: 40)

Given that our 1975 study included cross-sex exchanges between familiar, and in some cases, intimate pairs conversing casually under relaxed circumstances, it is possible that conversationalists' ritual ease with one another might have influenced our results.

In this essay we compare findings of our previous research with similar data from cross-sex interactions between previously unacquainted persons in a laboratory setting. Although these conditions are markedly different from those which our original results were produced, essentially the same pattern of interruption emerged. This result lends plausibility to our suggestion that the patterns we observe are a basic feature of interaction between males and females in our culture.²

We begin with a brief consideration of the concept of interruption, followed by a discussion of our research design and methods. In addition to comparing the findings of our present research to those of our original study, we analyze additional evidence bearing on the issue of whether or not women "invite" interruptions (e.g., by talking too much or by failing to struggle against them). We conclude with a discussion of the notion that the interruption is a device for exercising power and control in conversation.

INTERRUPTIONS

We define interruptions as violations of speakers' turns at talk (West & Zimmerman, 1977; Zimmerman & West, 1975).³ This definition is based on a model of turn-taking in conversation advanced by Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974). Sacks et al. argue that "one party at a time" is the preferred

SMALL INSULTS: A STUDY OF INTERRUPTIONS IN CROSS-SEX CONVERSATIONS BETWEEN UNACQUAINTED PERSONS*

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The exercise of power in interactions between women and men is perhaps most effective when it is muted, if not euphemized. Thus, while smiles, sociable chitchat, pats on the back, and the use of first names commonly communicate closeness and friendliness, such expressions can play an invidious part in exchanges between the sexes. For example, the smiles women offer men have been interpreted as gestures of appeasement (Firestone, 1970: 90; Goffman, 1979: 48), men's greater license to touch women has been linked to the expression of dominance (Henley, 1973, 1977), and gender-associated address terms have been analyzed as forms of "sexual politics" (McConnell-Ginet, 1978). Fishman's (1977, 1978a, 1978b) analyses of talk between cross-sex, intimate couples find that a couple's conversational topic is essentially the man's choice. Females, notes Fishman, must ask more questions, fill more silences, and use more attention-getting beginnings than their male partners.

Interruptions in conversation also appear to have micropolitical significance (Eakins & Eakins, 1978; Oetigan & Niederman, 1979; Leet-Pellegrini, 1980). A compelling "for instance" is provided by Eakins and Eakins (1978), who report that male faculty members contribute more interruptions to departmental faculty meetings than females. In their study, the "most interrupted" female was a faculty member who did not yet hold a Ph.D. degree, while the "least interrupted" male was the chairman of the department.

Our own early research (Zimmerman & West, 1975) on same-sex and cross-sex exchanges in natural settings found that interruptions were initiated very rarely in same-sex conversations, where they appeared in symmetrical distributions between individual speakers. But in cross-sex conversations, the pattern was grossly asymmetrical: males initiated all but two of the forty-eight

*This is a revised version of a paper presented at the American Sociological Association's annual meetings, San Francisco, Sept. 4-8, 1978. The authors would like to acknowledge the many helpful comments of Wendy Martyna, Sharon Veatch, Thomas P. Wilson, and the editors of this volume. We alone are responsible for any deficiencies in the paper.

order of conversational interaction from the viewpoint of speakers. Appropriate turn-taking places, which Sacks et al. term unit-types, include possibly complete words, phrases, clauses, or sentences, depending on their context.

Sacks et al. represent the mechanism for speaker transition as an ordered set of rules speakers employ to produce a normatively constrained order of conversational interaction. For each possible turn-transition place (i.e., completion of a unit-type as outlined above), these rules provide, in order of priority, that: (1) a current speaker may select a next speaker at talk (e.g., by using a term of address), and, if not choosing to do so, (2) a next speaker may self-select, and, if not, (3) the current speaker may continue. The exercise of any of the options recycles the entire rule-set back to the first option.

Sacks et al. suggest that each speaker, on initiating speech, is allocated at least one unit-type before the transition between turns ought properly to occur (1974: 702-4). But, since speakers also orient to minimizing gaps between turns at talk, they operate under tight constraint according to the model's provisions. On the one hand, they must be oriented to achieving turn-transition as close as possible to the actual completion of a current speaker's unit-type; on the other hand, they must avoid simultaneous speech occurrences (1974: 704-6). The delicate timing involved in honoring these constraints often produces a brief stretch of simultaneous speech initiated by a next speaker just as a current speaker arrives at a possible turn-transition place. Sacks et al. (1974: 706-8) note the routine occurrence of these brief simultaneities in the proximity (e.g., within a syllable) of possible completion points. We term this type of simultaneity an *overlap*, and view it as largely produced by constraints of the turn-taking system.

In contrast to overlaps, *interruptions* do not appear to have a systemic basis in the provisions of the turn-taking model. An interruption involves a "deeper intrusion into the internal structure of a speaker's utterance" than an overlap, and penetrates well within the syntactic boundaries of a current speaker's utterance (West & Zimmerman, 1977: 523). Defined operationally, candidate interruptions are incursions initiated more than two syllables away from the initial or terminal boundary of a unit-type.⁴ Given that conversationalists can precisely time the placement of their speech relative to that of their co-participants (Jefferson, 1973), such "deep" incursions are difficult to dismiss as "errors" produced by systemic constraints of the Sacks et al. model. Indeed, it is in terms of the model that interruptions can be viewed as *violations* of turn-taking rules (which provide that the proper place for transition between speakers is at the terminal boundary of a possible unit-type). We intend the term *interruption* to refer only to those deep incursions that have the potential to disrupt a speaker's turn, although actual disruption (e.g., diversion of activity within a turnspace to address the intrusion, including yielding the turnspace to the interrupter) is a product of further interaction between the parties (Jefferson & Schegloff, 1975; West, 1979).

Thus, it is important to distinguish interruptions from other instances of simultaneity which appear to ratify, or otherwise contribute to, the talk of a

current speaker. Jefferson (1973), for example, analyzes the emphatic "YEAH" interjected by a speaker, to display recognition of that which is in-the-course-of-being-said. "Saying the same thing at the same time," an instance of precision-timing, exhibits "independent knowledge" by the hearer of what the speaker is about to say (Jefferson, 1973). Intrusions such as these display active listening or intense involvement in the conversation. Interruptions, in contrast, have no such facilitative warrant. Instead, these incursions have the potential to disrupt turns at talk, disorganize the ongoing construction of conversational topics, and violate the current speaker's right to be engaged in speaking. In the following excerpts, drawn from our earlier data (West & Zimmerman, 1977: 527), we see the potential effects of interruption:⁵

Female: Both really (#) it just strikes me as too 1984ish y'know to sow your seed or whatever (#) an' then have it develop miles away not caring

Male: [Now: :] it may be something uh quite different (#) you can't make judgments like that without all the facts being at your disposal

Or:

Female: So uh you really can't bitch when you've got all those on the same day (4.2) but I uh asked my physics professor if I couldn't chan [go that

Male: [Don't] touch that

(1.2)

Female: What?

(#)

Male: I've got everything jus' how I want it in that notebook (#) you'll screw it up leafin' through it like that.

Here we observe interrupted speakers dropping out and interrupters using the usurped turns to pursue their own agendas.⁶

In summary, what we have called "overlaps" (Sacks et al. use the term to refer to all instances of simultaneity) are (1) events occurring in the immediate vicinity of possible turn-transition places; and (2) those brief utterances (e.g., "yeah," "right") or longer incursions (e.g., "saying the same thing at the same time") which have some facilitative warrant.

But interruptions cannot be explained by the operation of the turn-taking system, and reflect the influence of factors exogenous to the management of turn-taking per se. One such factor is, of course, the gender of conversationalists.

DESIGN AND METHODS

The research reported below is based on five cross-sex conversations recorded in a laboratory setting. Subjects of the study were white first-year and

second-year university students (five males and five females) between the ages of eighteen and twenty-one. We recruited students from large, lower division sociology courses who were all, by design, previously unacquainted with one another. Randomly paired, they were brought together in the laboratory and told to "relax and get to know one another" prior to discussion of a pre-selected topic ("bicycle safety on campus"). Conversationalists wore microphones from cords hung around their necks, and, with their knowledge and consent, they were audiotaped and videotaped through a one-way mirror. The audio portion of the initial twelve minutes in which speakers were free to talk about matters of their own choosing was fully transcribed, yielding 107 pages of transcript for purposes of our present analysis. In these transcripts, we identified instances of interruption as we have defined it.

We used unacquainted persons as subjects for the following reasons. First, in the original study, the majority of conversation pairs were previously acquainted, and it is possible that the pattern of male-initiated interruption we observed might have been affected by unknown factors peculiar to the catch-as-catch-can sample. Using randomly paired strangers reduces the plausibility of this alternative hypothesis. Beyond this issue, we surmised that the formality of the laboratory setting and the notion that people meeting for the first time are more likely to "stand on ceremony" (i.e., exhibit regard for the ritual order of interaction) might inhibit interruption, if interruption is seen as an act of impoliteness (cf. Goffman, 1967: 33-40). In addition, we analyzed only the initial twelve minutes of conversation—a brief enough interval to assume that interactants were still on their "best behavior" and a relatively small window through which we might observe a pattern originally located in longer sequences of talk.

Thus, we argue that reproduction of a similar pattern of predominantly male-initiated interruption under these conditions offers evidence for the robustness of the phenomenon, at least in a university community.

FINDINGS

Our earlier study of acquainted conversationalists found marked asymmetries in initiations of interruptions between persons in cross-sex dyads (Zimmerman & West, 1975). The exchanges we analyzed were selected from longer stretches of talk by excerpting all topically coherent segments exhibiting two or more instances of silence or simultaneous speech, without regard for who overlapped whom. In other words, those segments were selected precisely because of the silence and simultaneity they contained. Three-fourths of our total data were recorded unobtrusively in drugstores, coffee shops, and other public places in a university community; the remainder were taped in private dwellings. Nine of the eleven cross-sex exchanges ensued between previously acquainted persons, whose relationships with one another ranged from casual acquaintanceship to intimacy (Zimmerman & West, 1975: 111-12).

In that study, the cross-sex transcripts displayed gross asymmetries. Forty-six out of forty-eight, or 96% of the interruptions were done by males to females. Ten of our eleven cross-sex interactions exhibited interruptions, ranging from a low of two to a high of thirteen and averaging 4.2 per transcript. And, in every conversation, the male interrupted the female more frequently than the converse.

Give the marked asymmetry in the initiation of interruptions, we concluded that "men deny equal status to women as conversational partners" and that "just as male dominance is exhibited through male control of macro-institutions in society, it is also exhibited through control of at least a part of one micro-institution" (Zimmerman & West, 1975: 125).

As Table 1 reveals, our second study reproduces the findings of our earlier research. A total of twenty-eight interruptions were observed, of which twenty-one or 75% were male-initiated—a lesser proportion than in the first study, but still three times more frequent overall than female-initiated interruption.⁷ Each of the five cross-sex exchanges exhibited interruption, ranging from a low of four to a high of eight and averaging 5.6 such events per transcript. Moreover, as was the case in the first study, males interrupted females more often in each of the five conversations, ranging from 63% (five of eight) to 100% (four of four). While the number of events is small, the consistency of the pattern is remarkable: the probability of males initiating more interruptions in all five conversations by chance is .03125 (binomial test). Thus, observations made three years later than the first study and employing more stringent procedures yield essentially the same finding.⁸

Table 1. Interruptions in 5 Cross-Sex Conversations Between Unacquainted Persons

Conversations ^a	Amount of interruption		Total
	Male-initiated interruptions	Female-initiated interruptions	
DYAD 1	75%	25%	100% (4)
DYAD 2	100	0	100 (4)
DYAD 3	67	33	100 (6)
DYAD 4	83	17	100 (6)
DYAD 5	63	37	100 (8)
Total	75% (21)	25% (7)	100% (28)

^aListed in order of increasing interruptions.

WHY DO MEN INTERRUPT?

Clearly, our earlier results cannot be explained away as a function of intimacy between cross-sex conversational partners. As we have seen, males interrupt females more often even when parties to talk are previously unacquainted. What then accounts for such findings?

As in so many other domains of sexual inequality (e.g., the sex-segregated labor force, the income differential between "men's" and "women's" occupations), gender is often invoked to justify or rationalize one or another aspect of what Goffman (1977) refers to as "the arrangement between the sexes." For example, there is the notion (ventured in classrooms and at professional conferences) that women "invite" interruption by men through somehow seeming to tolerate it or failing to struggle against it. This argument presumes, of course, that lack of evidence of a "fight" may be interpreted as "asking for" intrusion into one's conversational turnspace. However, West (1979) has shown that the pattern of females' responses to deep interruption contradicts this notion. In a study of cross-sex speakers' negotiations of who shall drop out of simultaneous speech and who shall continue, females were no more likely to drop out than were males when their turns were interrupted. The turnspace was more often ceded to the interrupter than to the interrupted party, regardless of the intruder's gender.⁹

Another explanation for males' disproportionate interruption of females focuses on the amount of talk women are thought to do in cross-sex exchanges. Here, the idea is that women are so "gabby" that men may be forced to interrupt them "simply to get a word in edgewise." Certainly, this issue is clouded by our stereotypes regarding the amount of talk in which women *ought* to engage (see Kramer, 1975: 48).

Existing empirical research on how much women actually talk, compared with men, contains a number of unfortunate ambiguities. Brownell and Smith (1973) note that amount of speech in a sentence, length of response, average total number of words produced, time periods of speech, and mean number of words per pause have all been used as indices of "amount of speech." Some studies have employed noninteractional research designs to obtain measurements (e.g., Gall et al., 1969; Swacker, 1975); others (e.g., Stroudbeck, 1951; Soskin & John, 1963) have examined taped discussions. While the evidence is not conclusive, the literature suggests that men talk as much or more than women when the sexes converse (Argyle et al., 1968; Bernard, 1972; Hilpert et al., 1975; Kenkel, 1963; Stroudbeck & Mann, 1956; Wood, 1966).

To be sure, the pertinent issue for our own studies is not just the amount of speech produced (by whatever criterion), but its relationship to conversational control. For example, Komarovsky cautions that the dominant partner in a marriage may not be the most talkative partner: "He doesn't say much" (says his wife) "but he means what he says and the children mind him." (1967: 353). However, Eakins and Eakins' (1978: 26) analysis of departmental faculty meetings finds that the number of turns taken (like the number of interruptions initiated) increases with status in the department (e.g., rank or length of tenure), and that "males, without exception, spoke longer per turn." Males' longer turns, we note, may be a function of many things—among them, less frequent interruption by females.

With these considerations in mind, we reanalyzed our cross-sex exchanges between unacquainted persons to see what—if any—relationship existed

between amount of talk and interruption. One possible procedure for assessing this relationship might be a simple count of the total number of syllables, words, or unit-types uttered by males in comparison with females. However, this method is clearly unsatisfactory if the "hypothesis" (of greater female talkativeness) is construed to mean that males interrupt females because they want to say something and females, by virtue of their talkativeness, do not afford them the opportunity to do so. To support this hypothesis, one would have to relate the *local* amount of speech to the occurrence of interruption; that is, show that males tend to interrupt females when the latter talk on "at length." At the very least, then, we would expect that males' interruptions would occur later in the females' turns than the converse, since implicit in the notions of males' interrupting to "get a word in edgewise" is the male's "justifiable impatience" with not being able to speak. If interruption is to be warranted on such grounds, it should come "late," rather than "early," in the female's turn. Consequently, as a rough measure of "amount of speech" we counted the number of syllables to onset of interruption (including the syllable interrupted if such be the case) beginning with the initiation of the interrupted speaker's turn. Vocalizations such as "Mm" and "Uh" were counted as syllables. Clearly, we might count words or even unit-types as measures of "talking too much," a point to which we return below.

The hypothesis stated above receives no support; indeed the opposite appears to be true. Males interrupt females, on the average, 12.1 syllables ($s=11.9$) from the beginning of their turns. Females interrupt males (albeit less frequently) an average of 25.4 syllables ($s=14.2$) into their turns. If anything, this finding suggests that it is females, not males, who interrupt to "get a word in edgewise." Moreover, using either words to onset or unit-type to onset—units obviously related, though imperfectly, to syllables to onset—we get substantially the same results.¹⁰ By none of these measures does females' alleged "gabbiness" account for males' intrusions into their turns.

Below, we discuss some implications of these findings in relation to issues of power and control in the larger context of institutional arrangements in our society.

DISCUSSION

Our conversations between unacquainted persons were collected three years after the earlier materials were assembled. In the years between 1972 and 1975, much has been made of the anticipated consequences of the feminist movement and changing attitudes toward women's and men's roles. Whatever changes may have occurred, we have found—under conditions which constitute a conservative test—a pattern of male-initiated interruption in conversations between strangers which is substantially similar to our earlier findings. Assuming this to be the case, some people may, nevertheless, say that inequality in the arena of turn-allocation (and the associated opportunity to develop a

coherent string of utterances within a given turn) is trivial compared to the inequality that exists in the larger societal context. When viewed from a perspective encompassing the fate of women in the various institutional domains of society, the many small insults women suffer in face-to-face interaction do perhaps seem trivial. Yet, we would argue that the gestures of power¹¹—minor in import viewed one by one—are an integral part of women's placement in the social scheme of things. These daily gestures are constant "reminders" which help constitute women's subordinate status. Let us consider this point in more detail.

Interruptions in cross-sex conversation are only one aspect of the relationship between men and women in this society. A fuller picture can be obtained only through study of a broad range of circumstances which, in turn, hinge on large-scale institutional arrangements.

Everyday encounters do not merely reproduce larger institutional arenas. Social occasions are the habitat of a variety of situated identities and located activities which occur within the context of a larger society, and are distinguishable from it. Yet, if these occasions do not simply mirror the patterns of more massive institutional activity, they are not immune to the influence of what Goffman has termed "externally realized matters" which

... are given some official place and weight in most encounters, figuring as avowed elements in the situation, even if only as determinants of the terms of address employed, as when two customers are treated alike except that one is called Sir and the other Miss. (1961: 29)

Thus, for example, when male and female subjects encounter one another for the first time in the somewhat unusual but nevertheless institutionalized setting of the laboratory, they take into account the circumstances they share, and their identities as subjects and students to fill the time with talk and to "get acquainted." Beyond the fact that participants could presumably recognize the sex category of their partner, sexual categorization was not in any obvious manner "built in" to the structure of the encounter in the way "subject" and "student" apparently were (the use of these identities as resources for talk was ubiquitous in all five exchanges—see Zimmerman and Maynard, 1979). Nevertheless, the distributional evidence prompts the inference that sex category was salient in the interaction and employed in and through the management of talk.¹² As Goffman has observed in a different context:

A man may spend his day suffering under those who have power over him, suffer this situation at almost any level of society, and yet on returning home each night regain a sphere in which he dominates. And wherever he goes beyond the household, women can be there to prop up his show of competence. . . . Wherever the male goes, apparently, he can carry a sexual division of labor with him. (1977: 315)

Assuming for the moment the generality of our findings, it also appears that whenever males and females talk, there are discernible echoes of "a sexual division of labor," and a quite portable one at that.

Throughout the research we discuss in this paper, we have relied on the work of Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974) to furnish a model of conversational structure which provides a theoretical context for interpreting the phenomenon of interruption. The model Sacks et al. have developed is an abstract and general system of rules by which conversational exchanges are finely and deeply ordered. It is analytically independent of, but simultaneously sensitive to, whatever systems of variables (speaker identity, social situation, etc.) may function as the input for the particular use by participants of turn-taking options. Consequently, the study of the effect of exogenous variables such as gender is a study of how such characteristics are transformed by participants into particular conversational events. Put another way, if particular developments in conversation, including the placement of the onset of speech, have the standing of events or actions, they are, in the first instance, events or actions accomplished through participants' use of conversational procedures. If we suppose that the system of options which comprise the mechanism of turn-allocation are oriented to (Sacks et al., 1974: 723-24) by conversationalists, the accomplishment of routine turn-taking furnishes a "seen-but-unnoticed" array of ordinary events which stand as a background against which violations and the consequences of such violations are made visible as possible "troubles." Interruption as a violation of turn-taking procedures is thus not a non-event, but a "happening" in the context of an ordered system for managing turn-transition. The intrusion may of course be ignored, or it may furnish the particulars of a complaint. However, it may also be subject to attempts to contest it in its course, or to repair the problems it may have occasioned—e.g., ambiguity concerning which of two or more simultaneous stretches of speech is to achieve implicativeness for the next utterance (cf. Jefferson & Schegloff, 1975). It is thus something more than an analyst's construct.¹³

If interruptions were randomly distributed across social categories of speakers, one could assume that their occurrence stems from purely local circumstances, i.e., factors peculiar to a given conversation. We have developed evidence that interruptions are not random relative to one type of social category, namely gender.¹⁴ Moreover, we argue that the fact that females find themselves subject to interruption more frequently than males in cross-sex conversations is not merely an indicator of a power differential, e.g., of the relative power to control one's turn at talk. The asymmetry in the initiation of interruption, insofar as it is a stable feature of the verbal interaction between men and women in this society, constitutes a power differential readily found in both ordinary and extraordinary settings in which men and women come together to talk (but see Beattie, 1981). It is, in other words, a way of "doing" power in face-to-face interaction, and to the extent that power is implicated in what it means to be a man vis-à-vis a woman, it is a way of "doing" gender as well (cf. Zimmerman & West, 1977).

APPENDIX

The transcript techniques and symbols were devised by Gail Jefferson in the course of research undertaken with Harvey Sacks. Techniques are revised, symbols added or dropped as they seem useful to work. There is no guarantee or suggestion that the symbols of transcripts alone would permit the doing of any unspecified research tasks: they are properly used as an adjunct to the tape-recorded materials.

Transcribing Conventions

Mary: I don't [know]
John: [You] don't

Brackets indicate that the portions of utterances so enclosed are simultaneous. The left-hand bracket marks the onset of simultaneity, the right-hand bracket indicates its resolution.

Colons indicate that the immediately prior syllable is prolonged.

A hyphen represents a cutting off short of the immediately prior syllable.

Both of these are used to represent heavier emphasis (in speaker's pitch) on words so marked.

Equal signs are used to indicate that no time elapses between the objects "latched" by the marks. Often used as a transcribing convenience, it can also mean that a next speaker starts at precisely the end of a current speaker's utterance.

Numbers in parentheses indicate the seconds and tenths of seconds ensuing between speaker turns. They may also be used to indicate the duration of pauses internal to a speaker's turn.

Score sign indicates a pause of about a second; that it wasn't possible to discriminate precisely.

Single parentheses with words in them indicate that something was heard, but the transcriber is not sure what it was. These can serve as a warning that the transcript may be unreliable.

Double parentheses enclose "descriptions" not transcribed utterances.

A: I (x) I did

Parentheses enclosing an "x" indicate a hitch or stutter on the part of the speaker.

A: Oh Yeah?

Punctuation marks are used for intonation, not grammar.

()

Empty parentheses signify untimed pauses.

*So you did.

The degree symbol represents softness, or decreased amplitude.

.hh hh eh-heh

These are breathing and laughing indicators. A period followed by "hh's" marks an inhalation. The "hh's" alone stand for exhalation. The "eh's" are laughter syllables.

NOTES

1. One or the other of the authors carried a tape recorder and taped what could be heard by virtue of normal access available to any member of the public. Thus, the "sample" was based on availability or opportunity (Zimmerman & West, 1975: 111-12).

2. Other research, conducted before and after our 1975 study, appears to support this inference. Studies by Argyle et al. (1968), Ekman and Ekman (1976), McMillan et al. (1977), Natale et al. (1979), Oetegan and Niederman (1979), and Willis and Williams (1976) suggest that the pattern of male-initiated interruption (variously defined) is fairly stable. Leet-Pellegrini (1980), examining opening and closing portions of laboratory interactions between cross-sex dyads, did not observe a simple pattern of predominantly male-initiated interruption but instead reported a more complex pattern resulting from the three-way interaction of gender, expertise, and time (i.e., movement from opening to closing segments). Moreover, Beattie (1981) reports no significant asymmetry in interruptions between males and females in tutorial groups of three to six students and a tutor. He found that students tended to interrupt their tutor more frequently than the converse. Beattie's definition of interruption differs from ours, and it is therefore difficult to compare his research with our own, although he attempts to align his definition (after Ferguson, 1977) with ours for this purpose (Beattie, 1981: 31). An experimental study by Leffler et al. (1980) reports that people in "teacher" roles interrupt more than when they are cast in "student" roles, with the overall effect of status being greater than that of gender. However, West (1980) found that, in a medical setting, male physicians interrupt their patients more frequently than the converse, but that this pattern is reversed when the physician is a female. The interaction of gender, situation, and other social identities is clearly an important agenda for future studies of interruption patterns and other language behaviors.

3. Edelsky (1981) raises some provocative questions concerning the wisdom of confining analysis to a turn-taking framework rather than exploring parallel modes of organizing discourse. Her argument is lengthy and complex and thus difficult to summarize (much less discuss and evaluate) in an endnote. Should her use of the notion of "floor" prove useful, it may help to specify more precisely the conditions under which phenomena such as interruptions occur (and the linkage of interruption and other verbal instrumentalities of power to gender, status, and other related variables).

4. In our original study we defined interruption as the onset of simultaneous speech prior to the last word that could define the possible terminal boundary of a unit-type (Zimmerman & West, 1975: 114). We came to reconsider this definition on theoretical grounds, i.e., on the contrast between the notion of interruption and the idea of system-induced simultaneity (Sacks et al., 1974: 702-6).

We revised our earlier definition along more stringent lines, viewing "overlaps" as those simultaneities occurring within the first or last syllable of unit-types; "shallow interruptions" as simultaneities occurring within the second or second-to-last syllable, or between first and second or next-to-last and last syllable of unit-types; and "deep" interruptions as those onsets of simultaneity more than two syllables away from the beginning or end of a unit-type. We decided to consider only "deep" interruptions on the conservative assumption that onsets more than two syllables away from a unit-type boundary were least likely to be due to systemic reasons. The interruptions referred to in the body of this paper are, in these terms, "deep" interruptions.

Since we have shifted our definition between the original study and the laboratory investigation, obvious questions of comparability occur. We handled this problem by analyzing our laboratory results using both definitions, although for presentational purposes we shall present our findings employing the "deep" interruption criterion in the text and relegate to an endnote the results employing the earlier definition. As it turns out, the pattern of interruption remains robust in the face of the definitional switch, the only consequence being a reduction in the number of simultaneities classified as (deep) interruption. See endnote 7 below for further discussion.

5. The transcribing conventions used for our data are presented in the Appendix to this paper. Brackets are used to encase those positions of speakers' utterances that are simultaneous.

6. Of course, not all interruptions "succeed," and the one interrupted may not yield. See also note 13.

7. As noted in note 4, the laboratory study employed a more stringent definition of interruption than the original research. Results reported in Table 1 use the later definition. Classifying the simultaneities observed in the laboratory using the original definition ("prior to last lexical constituent") yields a larger number of interruptions (fifty-six versus twenty-eight) but the proportion of male-initiated interruptions is exactly the same, that is, 75%. Moreover, as was the case using the later definition ("more than two syllables"), males interrupted more frequently in each of the five dyads (in the order presented in Table 1: 80%; 100%; 83%; 75%; 56%).

8. Five female-female pairs and five male-male pairs were also recorded in the laboratory setting. For these unacquainted conversationalists, we found that interruption tended toward symmetry in six of the ten dyads. But, in two of the male-male exchanges and two of the female-female exchanges, interruptions were distributed asymmetrically between conversational partners. The four asymmetrical exchanges also contained the largest frequency of interruptions per dyad in our same-sex collection.

9. This comparison was not possible in our earlier study since there were only two interruptions of men initiated by women. Thus, the 1975 study may have portrayed women as more helpless in the face of interruption by a male than now appears warranted.

10. Using "words" as the unit of measure, average words to onset for male-initiated interruptions was 10.0 ($s=8.7$); the figure for female-initiated interruptions was 21.0 ($s=12.9$). Using "unit-types," the respective means are 1.67 ($s=.84$) and 2.43 ($s=.73$). In both cases, we counted the word or unit-type in progress at the time of interruption in calculating the value for each interruption.

11. Interruption is viewed as a form of dominance in studies by Argyle et al. (1968); Courtwright et al. (1979); Leet-Pellegrini (1980); Rogers and Jones (1975); and Willis and Williams (1976). For a broader perspective on the micro-politics of language and body behavior, see Henley (1977: 19-21).

12. On this matter, we should consider the accountability of certain features of those with whom we come into contact. One feature of any conversational exchange is that it is a potentially describable event. While one might characterize a conversation as about "nothing," one cannot so easily evade being able to say something about the person or persons one talked to. The sex, age, and race of the one spoken to are, we suspect, accountable features of persons, i.e., a shared and enforceable social accounting scheme. Insofar as this is so, we might be tempted to say that matters such as gender are always "noticeable" and "salient" in ways that other, more remotely situated identities may not be.

13. Comparisons of resolutions and retrievals of overlaps and interruptions reveal consistent differences in their consequences for subsequent conversation. For example, in the case of interruption (including now both shallow and deep interruptions [see note 4] in the fifteen same-sex and cross-sex laboratory dyads [$N=295$]), the resolution of states of simultaneity involved dropping out by one or both parties almost 30% of the time. Overlaps ($N=498$), in contrast, resulted in speakers dropping out in little more than 7% of the instances. Moreover, in the case of overlap speakers were more likely to finish their utterances within a state of simultaneous speech (49% versus 25%). Speakers also retrieved interrupted utterances (e.g., by repeating them "in the clear") more often than they retrieved portions of overlapped talk (34% versus 14%).

These findings suggest that our theoretical distinctions between overlap and interruption have empirical basis in the actual practices of conversationalists (Jefferson & Schegloff, 1975).

14. Thus far, we have been in a situation in which the activities of pursuing and understanding the phenomenon of interruption have limited the scope of the generalizations we might attempt. The detailed transcription necessary for our analyses has tended to reduce the number of dyads studied; the convenience of laboratory recording (among other things) has moved research from natural to contrived settings. As with most laboratory studies, the availability of students as subjects might lead to a focus on a particular population—one that is generally young, white, and affluent in an institutional setting and in a stage of life that might be characterized as a deferral of adulthood.

But power and the exercise of control constitute significant aspects of many recurring interactions in which women are engaged, such as those between bosses and employees, Blacks and whites, husbands and wives, or doctors and patients (West, 1980). Indeed, the proportion of cross-sex conversations between peers, such as college students of approximately equal age and status, is probably insignificant in comparison with the totality of talk between the sexes. At issue in further research is the matter of being male or female: whether and how this takes precedence—however subtly—over the realization of, and interaction with, the variety of situated identities we inhabit in everyday life.

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